

### Monday, March 25, 2019—Ruth 1-4

In the days of the judges, oppression often came from the peoples who lived in the land with the Israelites. For Naomi's family, oppression came in other forms. Drought drove them from their homeland to Moab. Death brought them to a new level of hopelessness.

Naomi could not see a future for her daughters-in-law in Israel with her once the crops began to produce again, yet Orpah and Ruth protested. She convinced Orpah to return home, but Ruth said she would make Naomi's God and people hers. The two of them came to Naomi's home, and Naomi told her people her suffering had made her bitter.

Ruth did not let the dire circumstance paralyze her. She saw an opportunity to gather grain for them both, and in the process she met Boaz, a relative of her late father-in-law. Her loyalty to Naomi had impressed Boaz (2:11), and he acted with grace and mercy toward Ruth. He allowed her to harvest in his fields and to eat at his table.

In time, he took her to be his wife. This was no small action. The law provided for close relatives to take the wives of deceased men in order to provide a lineage for the deceased. This meant the man took on the responsibilities of being a husband and father for the name of another man. Boaz did this for Ruth, and over the generations, their descendants would include Jesus Himself (4:18-22).

Thank God for the loyalty and blessing of family and church. Pray for faithfulness to Him and to one another to bring blessing and joy.

### Sunday, March 24, 2019—Judges 19-21

This section begins and ends with the haunting note—in those days there was no king. As a result, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Israel to this point had never had a king, but they had had significant leadership in Moses and Joshua that had been lacking for generations. The heinous treatment of the concubine, the horrific response of the Levite, and the resultant civil war were the manifestations of deep, spiritual symptoms.

In deepest darkness, the tiniest of lights can shine brightly. Within these difficult stories are the faintest flickers of hope. When Israel decided to join forces and battle Benjamin, one of their own, they took time to seek the counsel of God. He told them to

fight, and they took a severe loss. They went back and prayed again, and again they received clearance and sustained heavy losses. They prayed a third time, and God gave victory. The people were seeing the non-negotiable need to pray for God's wisdom.

Also, despite the terrible sin of Benjamin, the people of Israel did not want the tribe to be wiped out. They represented part of God's promise to Israel, so they devised a plan to help Benjamin repopulate. To be sure, this was a man-devised plan for kidnapping, but they were extending grace nonetheless. God was at work in the worst of situations.

Thank God for the leadership He provides through His indwelling Spirit. Praise Him for the ultimate reign of King Jesus. Pray for a life of wisdom, perseverance, and fruitfulness for His glory.

#### Saturday, March 23, 2019—Judges 16-18

Because God allows something does not mean He agrees with it. Samson went to Gaza and slept with a prostitute. To escape the men who lay in wait to kill him at sunrise, Samson removed the city gates by hand and left the city under cover of darkness. His God-given strength allowed him to survive, but this was no sign of approval from God.

Samson would indeed face the consequences of his indulging the flesh. He had bowed to the nagging of his first wife to reveal a secret. When Delilah asked him for the secret to his strength, he gave her clues. When she began to act on those and tried to imprison him, he should have known to stop sharing, yet he drew closer and closer to revealing the truth. His weakness for women compromised the gift God had given him. He lost his strength, his freedom, his eyesight, and his dignity—much too high a price.

Samson was a judge for Israel, and he was far from virtuous. God was choosing a variety of people to rescue His nation, and they were, to a certain extent, a reflection of the overall spiritual health of the nation. The nation was straying further and further from righteousness. "Now in those days Israel had no king" (18:1). There was no spiritual champion setting the example. As a result, people like Micah chose their own priests and made idols. Tribes like Dan followed suit and lived in reckless evil.

Pray for a life increasingly marked by holiness and fruitfulness.

### Friday, March 22, 2019—Judges 13-15

Judges chronicles the peoples' oppression by the Aramites, other Canaanites, the Midianites, and the Ammonites. God was faithful to raise up judges to crush these enemies and end their oppression. Then, in Judges 13, the Philistines arrive on the scene. They become a thorn-in-the-flesh oppressor who will remain for generations.

This oppression by the Philistines, like all the struggles of Judges, was self-inflicted. "Again the Israelites did what was evil . . ." (13:1). God could not allow His children to live unfaithfully without punishing them. True love does not stand idly by while the beloved makes self-destructive choices. God raised up Samson to deliver His people once again.

Even before he was born, Samson was special. His parents had not been able to have children, but God was going to change that. An angel told them to dedicate Samson as a Nazirite, meaning he would have special dietary and lifestyle choices all his life, and that God was going to use him to rescue Israel from the Philistines. One massive issue arose in Samson's adulthood, however—he wanted to marry a Philistine (14:1).

Like Israel in general, Samson wanted what God forbade, yet God was at work even in this challenge (14:4). Samson's weakness with women and impulsiveness (14:16-20) were flaws that foreshadowed his destiny. The Philistines' treatment of Samson's marriage and his retribution (15:1-8) foreshadowed their destiny as well. Mutual destruction awaited.

Praise God for establishing a Kingdom that will last forever. Pray for a life fully devoted to Him and His rule.

### Thursday, March 21, 2019—Judges 9-12

The law of the harvest says: 1) you harvest what you plant, 2) you harvest later than you plant, and 3) you harvest more than you plant. Abimelech learned this law the hard way. He conspired against his brothers and had them murdered so he could be king, but the people of Shechem eventually revolted against him. The people and the king all eventually experienced a gruesome end (9:1-57). God brought justice.

As the people continued to sow the seeds of idolatry and unfaithfulness, they harvested the bitter fruit of oppression (10:6-17). God told the people to cry out the gods

to which they had given themselves and see what power they truly had. His faithfulness and deliverance in the past had apparently not been good enough. In His grace and compassion, God grieved for the people when they repented and returned to Him.

Though Jephthah had been despised by his family, they turned to him in a time of crisis (not unlike how Israel treated God Himself). Jephthah confronted the king of Ammon with the righteousness of God and the lack of reason for Ammon's attack of Israel. Ammon paid no attention to this reasoning, so Jephthah led a victorious attack against them. Illustrating his imperfection, Jephthah made a hasty vow which cost him and his family dearly (11:29-40). God uses imperfect people.

Praise God for being perfect and just. Thank Him for using imperfect people. Pray for growth in obedience and usefulness. Sow seeds of righteousness so He might bring a harvest of peace and joy.

#### Wednesday, March 20, 2019—Judges 5-8

Everything rises and falls on leadership. Great armies and powerful nations have succeeded or crumbled because of the actions of the leaders. God uses leaders to bring glory to Himself and blessing to His people.

Deborah and Barak led Israel to victory over their oppressors, and they sang a song of celebration (5:1-31). They blessed the Lord in the first lines because God had called them to lead and because the people faithfully followed. They put their enemies on notice that they would face the same fate as Sisera because the people of God were united in obedience.

Sheep are prone to wander, and humans are prone to drifting. After the peaceful days of Deborah and Barak, the people once again became unfaithful and oppressed by an enemy. Gideon found himself hiding in a wine press trying to harvest grain to provide for his family because the Israelites were so afraid of being attacked (6:11-12).

In a bit of divine humor, God addresses Gideon as a mighty hero. (God sees people as He will make them, not as they are.) Gideon asked why his people suffered as they did, and he doubted aloud how and why God would choose him and use him to deliver his people. Nonetheless, God raised Gideon up to rescue the people in an unorthodox way (7:15-22).

Praise God for good leaders. Pray for faithfulness to His call in your life so you

will not drift but remain obedient even to the end.

Tuesday, March 19, 2019—Judges 1-4

Judges contains the stories of zeroes and heroes, tribes of God's people who failed at their God-given task and individuals called by God to deliver His people from darkness. Judges is somewhat of a misnomer as these leaders had little judicial activity. Most were on rescue missions (2:18).

Joshua had assigned every tribe their place in the new land, and each tribe is seemingly represented in Judges with their own story of sin, oppression, and deliverance. Many of the tribes failed to drive out the pagan inhabitants (1:19-35). This foreshadowed great trouble.

In addition to not driving out the inhabitants, there arose a generation after Joshua's death who did not acknowledge Yahweh or remember the mighty things He had done for Israel (2:10). Failure to pass down the stories and examples of faith led to disobedience and punishment.

God was testing His people to see whether they would obey, and they were failing the test miserably (2:22, 3:1). The allure of false gods and pagan practices was too strong. Sin was more attractive than He was.

The Lord is jealous. He will not react kindly when the affection He deserves is given to a false god. He handed His people over to foreign oppressors until His mercy moved Him to raise up a rescuer (3:9). God even used women (4:1-24) to lead the army and kill the enemy. When the people finally attacked the sin around them, they found peace (3:11, 20).

Thank God for rescue through Christ and the Spirit. Walk in obedience, and look for those who need rescue.

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